Children of Syria

Syrian children in Turkey get education despite language challenges

By Najwa Mekki

URFA, Turkey – It is 10 o’clock in the morning and the children waiting in the front yard of the Information and Education Center for Syrian Guests school in Urfa are getting restless. They’re hot, thirsty and impatient to see what their new classrooms are like.

Yet they manage to sit politely and listen as the town officials welcome them to the school, and look on in anticipation the ribbon-cutting ceremony gets under way.

But when they are finally allowed to join their classrooms, they dash into the building and run up the stairs, their mothers in tow.

There are over 2,600 Syrians registered with the local authorities in Urfa, a city in southeastern Turkey close to the border with Syria. The exact number is thought to be much higher as many families remain unregistered.

And while these families are managing as best they can to cope with their daily situation, their children’s schooling remains one of their biggest concerns.

“It is crucial for these children to go to school so that they resume their learning and feel safe and protected while doing so,” says Ayman Abulaban, UNICEF’s Representative in Turkey. “But school is also a way of creating co-existence and harmony with the host community. After all, education is a value shared by all parents, no matter where they are from.”

Turkey has opened its doors to hundreds of thousands of Syrians who have fled the violence and conflict of their home country. It has also opened its schools to their children, offering them free education alongside their Turkish peers.

Syrian children in Turkey get education despite language challenges

Providing relief for Syrian refugees

By Wendy Bruere

DOHUK, Iraq – Nawroz (19) arrived at the Syrian-Iraqi border checkpoint early in the morning. She had carried her four-month-old daughter Ava the whole way from Syria, and was soaking wet and shivering as she waited to register. But somehow she had managed to keep baby Ava dry.

“We were walking in the rain for two hours this morning. Ava was crying and hungry,” Nawroz says. “We used to live in Damascus, but there was bombing and we were afraid, so we left. We just brought some clothes with us.”

Each day, about 500 Syrian refugees cross the border at Saheela, northern Iraq. The process of registration at the government-run checkpoint takes about five hours.

Inside one of the registration offices, Sherin (10) and one of her sisters huddle by the heater while their parents register. The family had walked all the way from their home in Syria that morning.

“We were walking for hours today, I am very tired and wet,” Sherin tells me. “I have no idea what life will be like at Domiz camp.”

For Syrian refugees like these, who arrive at the border tired, scared and with uncertain futures, UNICEF is constructing latrines, drinking taps and a covered area on site to provide relief from the rain or sun, with seats for up to 240 people. These basic services will provide dignity and shelter for displaced and vulnerable people as they prepare for an uncertain future in a new country.
This little girl was born in the camp’s hospital tent three hours ago. Her mother arrived in Za’atari camp about a month ago heavily pregnant. “I hope for my baby that things go back to normal so that we can go back home. I want my child to grow up in Syria,” she says.

These three siblings (11, 10 and 6) and their family fled from the Syrian town of Deraa in late August 2012. “My children have lost a whole term at school,” their father says. The children are much happier now that they go to school.

But many parents have been reluctant to take up this offer, seeing no point in introducing their children to a new curriculum in a new language that will not be recognized once they go back to Syria.

“Learning the Turkish language and going to school here is great for those who are going to stay on,” says Khadija, a mother of four who fled Damascus five months ago. “We have no such plans. We will go back to Syria as soon as the war is over.”

Until then, a school with Arabic-speaking teachers is what they want most for their children – and what UNICEF has duly provided.

“This is the first UNICEF-supported school that is fully dedicated to Syrian children in host communities,” says Abu-Laban. “The teachers are Syrian volunteers and Arabic is the language of instruction.”

Local authorities donated the building and UNICEF refurbished it and provided the necessary furniture and supplies. The school has a capacity of nearly 500 students and will operate in two shifts. Teachers are being selected among the Syrian community here.

While the Turkish government has taken the lead in running the 18 camps housing Syrian refugees, UNICEF has been stepping up its education response both inside the camps and out, providing school tents, furniture and supplies.

UNICEF has also been supporting Turkish language classes for older students to increase their chances of joining Turkish universities.

“There are thousands of teenagers and young people here who have had to forego their dreams of becoming doctors, teachers and engineers,” says Abu-Laban. “What future will they have if they are just sitting around in a refugee camp?”
AMMAN, Jordan—When Abdulatif’s neighbour was killed and his own house destroyed, the decision was made simple. He had to flee the conflict in Syria to save his family. But the journey and challenges ahead were anything but easy, especially with two children with disabilities.

Abdulatif’s 15-year-old son with physical and mental disabilities is unable to walk. The boy has not spoken a word since the fighting in Syria broke out and taking care of him in a fly-infested tent in Za’atari refugee camp, Jordan, is a challenge in itself.

Then there is the despair over Abdulatif’s four-year-old daughter who needs surgery to restore her hearing.

“Before the war broke out she had an operation in Syria to put in a device that could make her hear,” says Abdulatif. After the operation, the little girl started to talk and was chatting away until shortly after arriving to Jordan, she suddenly went silent.

Doctors in Jordan gave Abdulatif the agonizing news. The piece that was implanted in her ear had stopped working, and the cost of a new device is over 10,000 dollars – money that the family has no way of obtaining.

Like her brother, who has not spoken since fighting broke out, Abdulatif’s 4-year-old daughter has gone silent. She needs surgery to restore her hearing - but her family has no way to afford the US$10,000 it will cost.

Conflict can lead to physical injuries, extreme duress from witnessing traumatic events, a breakdown in health services and a lack of access to proper food and safe water. And it can leave children separated from families, homes and schools, sometimes for years.

As needs rapidly outpace funds, the children of Syria are paying the highest price of the conflict - no one more so than those with disabilities, who risk being left out of the humanitarian response instead of taking their rightful place in helping to strengthen or rebuild their communities.

Abdulatif is determined not to have that happen to his daughter. “All I care about is this child,” he says. “I want her to hear again.”
**In Lebanon, a Syrian boy copes with disability and loss**

By Miriam Azar and Benedicte Vene

BEIRUT, Lebanon- Imagine you are a healthy 13-year-old boy from a prosperous family. One day at school, you witness the death of your classmates in a horrific bomb blast, and you realize one of your legs is missing. Suddenly forced to leave your home and your belongings behind, you walk across the border into a new country. You settle in a makeshift camp, living in poverty. And living with a disability.

“Sometimes, I wish I had died in the explosion,” Ali says. He looks down as he talks to Sahar Samhoun, a social worker at the UNICEF-supported NGO Himaya. Together with its sister agency Arc en Ciel, the organization provides psychosocial support, speech and psychotherapy to children with disabilities in eastern Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley.

Ali and his family fled their Syrian homeland six months ago, and now have to rebuild their lives from scratch while living in a makeshift tent in eastern Lebanon. Ali had to learn not only to cope with this life-changing upheaval, but also with the loss of a limb.

“Ali is still coming to terms with the tragedy he experienced in Syria,” says Ms. Samhoun, who regularly visits Ali and his family.

Although still in shock, Ali is taking fast steps forward. As the only son, he is determined to support his family. While Ms. Samhoun insists that Ali will go back to school one day, he currently attends the vocational training workshops provided by Arc en Ciel where he is now learning how to repair computers and mobile phones.

Increasingly, aid and social workers are seeing child refugees arriving from Syria with recent disabilities caused by the conflict. “Armed conflict is a major cause of disability among children,” says UNICEF Lebanon Representative Annamaria Laurini. “Children that have been displaced from Syria into Lebanon have often experienced or witnessed violence, are now living in poverty, and face an uncertain future. Learning to live with a disability creates an additional layer of vulnerability.”

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**Briefs**

**Syria**

UNICEF supported the installation of 29 semi-permanent learning units this year, providing safe access to education for 1,015 children.

**Lebanon**

With UNICEF support, 4,373 children and adolescents from Syria benefited from psychosocial services in the past four weeks, including non-formal education and recreational activities.

**Jordan**

UNICEF and partners are conducting an Education Week to increase school attendance in Za’atari camp. Activities include games and shows, as well as community mobilization through student volunteers and teachers.

**Iraq**

UNICEF supplied stationary and school kits for the 1,352 students currently enrolled in Jiyan basic school at Domiz Camp to help them continue their education over the summer.

**Turkey**

UNICEF is procuring pre-fabricated schools for three camps: Islahiye, Yaladagi and a new camp at Viransehir in Urfa.

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